

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 OES-02 SP-02

L-01 INR-05 INRE-00 CIAE-00 NEA-07 EB-03 PM-03 DODE-00

/047 W

----- 119707

P R 080539Z OCT 76

FM AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8496

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L TANANARIVE 1622

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: EFIN, MA

SUBJECT: RATSIRAKA'S INTEREST IN SOLVING NASA PROBLEM

REF: BARRETT/SHEINBAUM LETTER OF SEPT 13, 1976

1. SUMMARY. RATSIRAKA TOLD EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR OCT 5 THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO RESOLVE DIFFERENCES WITH US OVER NASA STATION, STATING THAT HE WOULD NOW CONSIDER BACK RENT ONLY FROM 1973 RPT 1973. RATSIRAKA SAID HE WAS INTERESTED IN HELP FROM US, BUT THIS MIGHT MEAN COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT RATHER THAN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. CHARGE IS UNDERTAIN ABOUT RELIABILITY OF RATSIRAKA'S INTERESTS AND INTENTIONS. GUIDANCE REQUESTED, SINCE CHARGE MAY HAVE MEETING SOON WITH RATSIRAKA. END SUMMARY.

2. EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR SCHARAFF INFORMED ME OCT 6 THAT HE HAD MET WITH PRESIDENT RATSIRAKA OCT 5, AT WHICH TIME RATSIRAKA APPEARED DESIROUS OF IMPROVING US-GDRM RELATIONS AND PARTICULARLY OF ENDING IMPASSE OVER NASA STATION. RATSIRAKA TOLD SCHARAFF THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO DISCUSS WITH USG QUESTION OF RENT FOR NASA STATION FROM 1973 ONLY, THEREBY ELIMINATING FURTHER DISCUSSION OF RENT PRIOR TO
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1973. SCHARAFF SAID RATSIRAKA WAS INTERESTED IN US

AID TO OFFSET AID FROM COMMUNIST COUNTRIES, BUT SCHARAFF WAS NOT SURE WHETHER THIS MEANT ECONOMIC AID OR COMMERCIAL INVESTMENT. SCHARAFF URGED THAT USG SERIOUSLY CONSIDER RATSIRAKA'S STATEMENT INASMUCH AS RATSIRAKA, HE BELIEVES, WAS SINCERE IN HIS INTEREST TO RESTORE BALANCE TO US-GDRM RELATIONS.

3. BECAUSE I HAD NOT SEEN RATSIRAKA SINCE LAST APRIL, I HAD REQUESTED ANOTHER AUDIENCE WITH HIM THREE WEEKS AGO TO REVIEW BILATERAL RELATIONS. HE HAS BEEN OCCUPIED SINCE THAT TIME WITH THE DJOUTCHE SEMINAR AND WITH CALLS BY VARIOUS VISITING DELEGATIONS. HE NORMALLY GRANTS REQUESTS FOR AUDIENCES FROM CHIEFS OF MISSION WITHOUT MUCH DELAY SO LONG AS THE VISITS ARE PERTINENT AND NOT TOO FREQUENT. SUCH AUDIENCES, THEREFORE, MAY BE GRANTED DURING NEXT FEW WEEKS.

4. ALTHOUGH QUESTION OF BACK RENT FOR ANY PERIOD UP UNTIL CLOSING OF NASA STATION IN JULY 1975 IS DEAD ISSUE, WOULD USG BE WILLING TO PAY TOKEN AMOUNT IN ORDER TO RECOVER WHAT-EVER EQUIPMENT MIGHT STILL BE IN USEABLE CONDITION? IT MUST, OF COURSE, BE BORNE IN MIND THAT TOKEN AMOUNT WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE SATISFACTORY TO RATSIRAKA, ASSUMING HE IS COUNTING ON ONE MILLION DOLLARS PER YEAR FOR 1973-75. NONETHELESS, TOKEN OFFER MIGHT AT LEAST OPEN DISCUSSIONS-- IF RATSIRAKA IS SERIOUS.

5. GDRM HAS STILL NOT REPLIED TO OUR DEC 1975 DIPLOMATIC NOTE RE STATUS OF OUR EQUIPMENT AT THE STATION. STATION IS UNDER LOCK, KEY, AND WAX SEAL, AND WE CONTINUE TO BE HOPEFUL OF GAINING ACCESS FOR RECOVERY OF ITEMS LISTED IN NOTE WE SENT TO MFA AUGUST 26 (TANANARIVE 1407 AND STATE 219986).

6. ACTION REQUESTED: SINCE I AM HESITANT TO ENGAGE IN DISCUSSION OF BACK RENT, SHOULD QUESTION BE RAISED BY RATSIRAKA, I WOULD APPRECIATE DEPARTMENT'S FURTHER GUIDANCE.

7. COMMENT: SCHARAFF HAS BEEN HERE FIVE YEARS, KNOWS CONFIDENTIAL

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RATSIRAKA REASONABLY WELL, AND SAW RATSIRAKA MONTHLY FROM TIME LATTER BECAME PRESIDENT. WHILE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT MALAGASY AFFAIRS, SCHARAFF IS NOT EXPERIENCED IN DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS, BEING A CAVALRY OFFICER BY PROFESSION. HE IS ALWAYS TOO EAGER TO TAKE WHAT RATSIRAKA SAYS AT FACE VALUE. RATSIRAKA MAY INDEED TRY TO FLOAT A NEW INITIATIVE AND MAKE A FINAL FLING AT OBTAINING SOME FINANCIAL BENEFIT OUT OF THE NASA STATION, OR HE SIMPLY MAY HAVE WANTED SCHARAFF

TO CONVEY TO DIPLOMATIC CORPS THE IMPRESSION THAT GDRM IS TRYING TO BE REASONABLE WHILE USG IS OBSTINATE.

8. DURING PAST FEW MONTHS, RATSIRAKA HAS TRIED TO CONVINCE HIGH-LEVEL VISITORS FROM WESTERN COUNTRIES THAT (A) HE IS VERY APPRECIATIVE OF ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE WEST, (B) HE WOULD LIKE MORE, (C) AID FROM SOVIETS AND OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES COMES WITH TOO MANY STRINGS, (D) SOVIET AND EE AID TO AFRICAN COUNTRIES HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLY LESS EFFECTIVE THAN PROPAGANDA WOULD ALLOW, AND E) HE REALLY WANTS TO MAINTAIN POLICY OF "TOUS AZIMUTS." LATEST VICTIM OF THIS PROPAGANDA WAS CLAUDE CHEYSSON, COMMISSIONER OF EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, ONE MONTH AGO. UNFORTUNATELY, FRENCH, GERMANS, ITALIANS AND OTHERS CONVEYED RATSIRAKA'S MESSAGE BACK TO CAPITALS WITH ENTHUSIASM AS BEING RATSIRAKA'S NEW OUTLOOK. EXCEPT FOR NOW-DEPARTED FRENCH AMBASSADOR, ROGER, AND JAPANESE, OTHERS DISAGREED WITH MY SKEPTICISM. HOWEVER, THEY HAVE CAUTIOUSLY BEGUN TO TAKE DIFFERENT ATTITUDE SINCE EXPULSIONS OF US EMBASSY PERSONNEL.

9. ALTHOUGH I DOUBT RATSIRAKA'S SINCERITY RE IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH US, I BELIEVE THAT WE WOULD BE REMISS IF WE DID NOT PROBE FUTHER, EVEN RECOGNIZING THAT BACK RENT IS DEADLETTER. I HAVE REQUESTED GUIDANCE WITH THAT IN MIND.SHEINBAUM

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISPUTE SETTLEMENT, ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, INSTRUCTIONS, FOREIGN RELATIONS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, TRACKING STATIONS, INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 OCT 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976TANANA01622
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760380-0716
From: TANANARIVE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19761065/aaaacekh.tel
Line Count: 139
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 APR 2004 by RowellE0>; APPROVED <13 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RATSIRAKA'S INTEREST IN SOLVING NASA PROBLEM
TAGS: EFIN, MA, US, EG, (RATSIRAKA, DIDIER), (SCHARAFF)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006